



EarthWatch Rhode Island



Topic: Farm Viability - Rhody Warm Program

Air Date: Saturday, November 17, 2007, Bally Duff Farm, Gloucester

Rhode Island's approximately 120 sheep farmers have difficulty selling their wool. The increased use of synthetic fibers and the decline of wool textile mills in New England turned raw wool into a nuisance rather than a product. As a result excess raw wool is often stored on the farm, used as compost, buried, or disposed of at local landfills. Rhode Island sheep producers approached DEM and the Rhode Island Resource Conservation & Development Council to investigate options for the local use of raw wool. In 2006, the producers received a \$20,000 USDA Rural Development grant to start up and support the Rhode Island Sheep Cooperative.

Working together and with inspiration from the successful Rhody Fresh Milk program, the partners established Rhody Warm - a project to produce quality wool blankets and to bring more income to farmers. The first wool collection day was held in June 2006. Nineteen (19) producers collected over 1,400 pounds of wool at the Southside Community Land Trust's Urban Edge Farm in Cranston, Rhode Island. The wool produced 370 blankets, which sold out almost immediately. In June 2007, 32 producers collected almost 2,000 pounds of wool for the 2007 blankets shipment of approximately 500 blankets.

Participating Sheep Growers

2 Sheep Farm, South Kingstown
Andrews Farm, Cranston
Bally Duff Farm, Gloucester
Birchwood Farm, Clayville
Cedar Knoll Farm, North Scituate
Dakota Livestock, Wakefield
Douglas Langdon, West Kingston
Fenner Hill Farm, Hope Valley
Lightening Ridge Farm, East Greenwich
Maybe Tomorrow Farm, Gloucester
Mistwood Farm, North Smithfield
Nest Egg Farm, Rockville
Red Horse Farm, Exeter
Rocky Hollow Farm, Carolina
Sederback Farm, Gloucester
Seldom Seen Farm, Gloucester
Simmons Farm, Middletown
Stonebridge Farm, Gloucester
Sunny Acres Farm, Gloucester
Sweet Hollow Farm, Kingston
VanDexter Farm, N. Kingstown
Watson Farm, Jamestown
Woodland Farm, Gloucester

The Process

Farmers shear the sheep and bring the wool to a collection day, where it is sorted by color and quality and bagged for shipment to Minnesota for washing and cleaning. The wool is then returned to New England and spun into yarn at S&D Spinnery in Milford, Mass. The Rhody yarn then travels to Richmond Textiles in South Grafton, Mass. where it is woven into bolts of fabric. Finally, the blankets are finished at Riverpoint Lace Mills in West Warwick where the napping (the process of making them softer and fuzzier) takes place.

Ultimately, the partners hope that more wool producers will participate in the project which will promote the sustainability of local agriculture and agricultural products.

How To Order

To order a Rhody Warm Blanket please contact the RC&D Council at: telephone: 401-822-8877 or email: chris.modisette@ri.usda.gov. Blankets are available in a variety of sizes from a large throw to king size, with prices ranging from \$80 to \$225.

For more information about Rhody Warm and Rhode Islands other Farm Viability Programs, visit www.dem.ri.gov and click on the Agriculture in Rhode Island link.

Interviews:

- Dr. Scott N. Marshall, DEM's State Veterinarian, provided background on Rhody Warm as one of the Farm Viability initiatives that DEM supports to sustain and protect local farms.
- Chris Modisette, Resource Conservation & Development Coordinator, USDA/Natural Resources Conservation Service provided background on Rhody Warm
- Robin Meek, owner of Bally Duff Farm and member of the RI Sheep Cooperative talked about how the program has benefited them as sheep farmers.



Dr. Scott N. Marshall



Chris Modisette



Robin Meek